Video
FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Observing Instruction to Build Capacity
Waterford High School, California • June 2008

Topic: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools
Practice: Improving Instruction

Highlights

- This coaching session conducted by the chair of the math department follows an observation of an Algebra core class using a classroom observation form.
- This coaching session focused on checking for students' understanding.
- The teacher explained his decision making for calling on non-volunteers and for calling on English Language Learners.
- The chair of the math department commended the teacher for following up with students who did not know the answer to the question the first time and proposed ways to improve on the strategy of checking on students' understanding.

About the Site

Waterford High School
Waterford, CA

Demographics
55% White

40% Hispanic

1% Asian

1% Black

46% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

13% English Language Learners

9% Special Education

Waterford High School had several components to its successful turnaround process:

- Collaborative agreement on the school's mission statement, which includes the school's vision, beliefs, and expected student outcomes
- Collaborative decision-making processes as part of creating new instructional norms for the school
- Use of a data-driven approach and collaboration among teachers in planning instruction

Full Transcript

Title Slide: The Chair of the Math Department observed an Algebra teacher as part of the school's ongoing professional development support to teachers.

Carolyn Viss (observing teacher): Some other things that I saw, I was looking at our observation form and your lesson had an objective. The students knew what the objective was. The objective was to solve proportions, and you used popsicle sticks to check for understanding. You called on two students as non-volunteers, and then I kind of jumped in and had the whole class do a choral response. What my thinking about that was that with two students only, you wouldn't know for sure if all the students knew what the objective was. So those were a couple of things that I saw. How do you usually check for understanding on an objective or check with the students to know what an objective is?

Travis Walsh (classroom teacher): I usually do three popsicle sticks. I don't know why I didn't do three this time, and usually I ask them, "What's the objective?" and "What are we going to do today?" Those are the two phrases I use. That's about it.

Viss: Awesome. One of the other things that I noticed in your lesson was the TAPPLE [Teach first, Ask a specific question, Pause, Pick a non-volunteer, Listen to the response, provide Effective feedback], which you are referring to right now. You were very consistent about teaching first the content that you were holding the students accountable for—both the concept and the skill. You taught the students before you asked them questions, and then you asked them questions. You didn't just leave it at teaching and say, "Okay. I have taught it, move on," but you then asked questions. You picked non-volunteers the majority of the time, and then you listened to their response. There were a couple of times that I noticed you echoing just if the student had answered correctly, you just echoed back that correct response. And there were a

couple of times where I heard you kind of elaborating on the answer that the student had given you, where they were definitely on the right track, but maybe they were using a word or a phrase that might confuse other students in their understanding, and so you paraphrased it into a way that would make more sense for the rest of the class.

Walsh: Would you recommend me going back and having them rephrase their answer after I elaborate, or how would you deal with something like that? If they are a little bit off, they are close?

Viss: I think that might be a good time to maybe take the heat off of the student that you have just called on and go to another non-volunteer in the class. Then, now, that first student who was really on the right track but had maybe a little bit of a misconception, they have heard your paraphrase, and then they have heard maybe another student or two respond to the same question.

Walsh: One of the problems I ran into—I am not sure if you noticed—but I pulled out a popsicle stick and I read one of my English learner names on it after I had already asked the question wait time, and I didn't feel comfortable asking her that type of elaboration question. So I went back and pulled a second name, asked the second student, and then reworded the next question so I knew she could answer it, and that's something I am always working with. How far can I push an English language learner out of their comfort zone? A lot of times, especially the girls, if you push them too hard, they clam up. So I try to kind of tread lightly. That's one of the issues I am dealing with, is how far to push them, and then what do you do if you pull that name, it's their turn, and I don't know if it's okay to slide them behind? Do you have any suggestions?

Viss: Well, a couple of things that you might consider are maybe just allowing extra wait time for that EL student, depending on the level of the question. Or maybe that would be a good time to, you know, you have got your stick in your hand and they all think, "Oh, he is going to call my name, he is going to call my name," and then say, "Okay, tell your neighbor what you are thinking right now. Tell your neighbor," and provide them an opportunity in a much safer atmosphere. Instead of "Here I am speaking to the whole class," "I am just speaking to my partner here, we are having a conversation, and I won't be embarrassed if I don't know or if my answer is not quite on." So a couple of things, strategies that you might use.

Another thing that I really admired in your lesson was you did have a couple of times that you called on a student and they didn't know. And what I noticed was you did not let that student off the hook. You called on another student, but then without exception, you came back to that student so they knew, "I may be able to say 'I don't know' for a minute, but eventually, I am going to have to know. I am accountable for this knowledge or for this concept."